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SUBJECT: West Caribbean Airline's August 16 accident

1. Summary. On August 16, a Colombian airliner operated by West Caribbean crashed in Venezuela along the Colombian border during its flight from Panama to Martinique. All 152 passengers and eight crew members were killed aboard the MD-82 aircraft. End Summary.

2. In the early hours of the morning on August 16 Captain Omar Ospina radioed the control tower in Maiquetia, Venezuela saying that neither of the plane's turbines were functioning. Ospina also requested the locations of nearby airports. The aircraft was descending rapidly and the captain said that the plane was out of control. Contact was lost prior to the crash.

3. Although there is much rumor and speculation, no one is exactly sure what caused the accident. The French civil aviation authorities will be examining the two black boxes from the plane, although Venezuelan authorities are currently in possession of them. Fernando Sanclemente, director of the Colombian Civil Aviation Authorities (CAA), announced that all West Caribbean flights will be cancelled until a thorough examination of the airline is completed.

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History of West Caribbean's Troubles  
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4. West Caribbean began to have financial troubles in the beginning of 2005. According to "El Tiempo", Colombia's leading daily newspaper, the airline's ridership dropped significantly after an accident on the Colombian island of Providencia killed nine passengers in March 2005.

5. In May the CAA initiated a thorough investigation of West Caribbean. Ten of the airline's twelve aircraft failed to meet Colombian flight safety standards. As a result, all but two planes in West Caribbean's fleet were immediately grounded. Concerned about the continued liquidity of the airline, the Superintendence of Ports and Transportation proceeded to take control of West Caribbean and demanded that its owners present a plan showing how it would eliminate its growing debt and become profitable over the long term.

6. In July West Caribbean presented a plan detailing financial operations through 2012, showing how its financial debt would slowly be eliminated. The government accepted the plan, and required that the airline provide an update every three months to ensure that it was meeting its projected goals.

7. As part of the liquidity plan, West Caribbean had planned on bringing an additional plane into service that met the CAA's safety standards by the end of August. An additional plane was to be introduced in September. After the August 2005 crash the future of the airline's additional planes, as well as the future of the company itself, is in question.

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Preventative Measures Taken to Ensure Flight Safety  
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8. Safety Inspections: Since the beginning of the year, West Caribbean has received 56 on-ground inspections, 52 in-flight examinations, two headquarters visits, and six satellite office inspections. The quantity of inspections has exceeded the minimum requirements. Captain Consuegra, CAA Secretary of Air Safety, affirmed that any aircraft failing to meet all of the Colombian flight safety standards are immediately grounded, although he did not say how many had been grounded recently.

9. Accident Aircraft Inspection: CAA Assistant Director Colonel Carlos Montealegre stated in a press briefing that a meticulous inspection of the accident aircraft had been performed by the CAA immediately before the plane left its Medellin headquarters for Panama. At 8:30 PM on August 15, a CAA inspector found that the airplane met all of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) flight safety standards.

10. Crew Rest: During the 11-hour operation of the aircraft

on August 15 and 16, three sets of flight crews were used. The CAA verified that all had complied with international standards concerning crew rest.

11. Sufficient Fuel: Consuegra stated that the airplane had more than adequate fuel for all flights taken.

12. Comment: After the August 16 West Caribbean crash and the September 1 crash of a private plane that killed all eight passengers, the CAA's flight safety standards are under close scrutiny by Colombian politicians and the public. CAA officials are confident in their flight safety reviews, and that the ongoing accident investigations will not uncover safety concerns that should have been identified during regular inspections. Federal Aviation Administration officials have been working closely with the CAA's Air Safety division in order to improve compliance with international safety standards (septel).

13. West Caribbean flights remain grounded.

Drucker